

AFRICA NEWS REPORT



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NEW DEPUTY DIRECTOR AND INFORMATION ASSISTANT AT AFRICA REGIONAL SERVICES, PARIS

Two new colleagues have joined Africa Regional Services this summer. **Ms. Linda Cowher** assumed her duties as Deputy Director in August, and **Mr. Pascal Sim** is the new Information Assistant in charge of the "Africa News Report."

We hope that you will enjoy this electronic version of the "Africa News Report." Please do not hesitate to contact us for information concerning our services.

Sincerely,

The Africa Regional Services Team

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09/11/2006

Sudan Urged To Accept U.N. Peacekeepers

(United States call on Khartoum government to cooperate on helping Darfur)

By Judy Aita
Washington File United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- The United States called on Sudan September 11 to work with the U.N. Security Council to help the suffering people of Darfur.

William Brencick, U.S. minister counselor for political affairs, said that the United States will submit a draft of a presidential statement "to allow the council to speak for the international community with one strong clear voice and to say to the Government of National Unity: Work with us because the situation in Darfur cannot stand."

The U.N. Security Council held its second meeting in 10 days on Sudan in an effort to resolve the impasse with senior Sudanese officials over the deployment of 20,000 U.N. peacekeepers to replace the overburdened African Union mission in the region. Senior Sudanese officials have not met with the council; Khartoum was represented at the meeting by the chargé of the government's U.N. mission.

The Security Council adopted Resolution 1706 on August 31 asking the secretary-general to arrange for the rapid deployment of the U.N. Mission in Sudan (UNMIS). But Sudan is opposing any U.N. involvement in Darfur peacekeeping and has threatened to expel the African Union troops at the end of September.

Brencick, questioned Sudan's claim to be open for talks with the United Nations.

The Sudanese chargé did not deliver Sudan's consent to the deployment of U.N. forces, he said.

"How many people need to describe the horror of the situation in Darfur or how much worse must the situation become before the Government of National Unity gets the message?" Brencick said. "Adoption of

Resolution 1706 was a first step. The second and more crucial step is implementing it."

The U.S. representative said that the international community must support the African Union and its Darfur peacekeepers at this critical point.

"If the AU Peace and Security Council decides to extend AMIS through the end of the year, everyone, including the Government of National Unity, must do all we can to support it," he said. "This includes immediately implementing Resolution 1706, which provides for robust assistance to AMIS."

U.N. Secretary-General Kofi Annan said that the situation in Darfur is critical. It is a crucial test of the council's authority and effectiveness, its solidarity with people in need and its seriousness in the quest for peace.

For two years, the Security Council has worked to stem the fighting and improve the situation, "yet once again we find ourselves on the brink of a new calamity," he said. "I urge you, I urge you in the strongest possible terms, to rise to the occasion."

The secretary-general also called on the governments and individual leaders in Africa and elsewhere to press Sudan to consent to the transition to a U.N. peacekeeping mission.

Annan discussed the reports of renewed fighting among the various factions in north Darfur, fighting that not only violates the peace agreement but is bringing "even greater misery to a population that has already endured far too much."

The fighting has made it difficult for humanitarian workers to provide aid and the workers themselves are becoming targets of brutal violence and physical harassment, he said. Twelve aid workers have lost their lives in the last two months, more than in the previous two years.

"Unless security improves, we face the prospect of having to drastically curtail an acutely needed humanitarian operation," Annan said. "Can we, in conscience, leave the people of Darfur to such a fate? Can the international community, having not done enough for the people of

Rwanda in their time of need, just watch as this tragedy deepens?"

Recalling the U.N. General Assembly's acceptance of the principle of the international community's responsibility to protect civilians suffering violence and human rights abuses, Annan said, "Lessons are either learned or not; principles are either upheld or scorned."

"This is no time for the middle ground of half-measures or further debate," the secretary-general said.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

9/13/2001

U.S. Millennium Aid Agency Adds Two Policy Benchmarks

("Indicators" will focus on environment, land access, MCC says)

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) is adding to the 16 performance benchmarks that it uses to judge whether a country qualifies for MCC development grants.

Two new benchmarks -- or indicators -- will measure a candidate country's progress toward adopting policies to protect the environment and to make land ownership more accessible to the poor, according to a September 11 MCC press release.

The new indicators initially will be used to give the MCC board of directors "non-binding supplementary information" about countries' qualifications for Millennium Development Account (MCA) grants awarded in fiscal year 2007 (FY07), said Sam Stratman, an MCC spokesperson. The MCC is a government corporation established in 2004 to administer MCA grants.

The indicators will be adopted fully for fiscal year 2008, after candidate countries have had an opportunity to become familiar with them, said MCC's Sherri Kraham, who worked on their development.

Before establishing the new indicators, MCC sought input from various nongovernmental organizations, universities and experts, Kraham said. NGOs providing input included the Nature Conservancy, World Wildlife Fund and World Resources Institute.

Many environmental policies that countries can adopt involve no- or low-cost solutions to problems that keep people in poverty and contribute to early childhood deaths, Kraham said.

Approximately 80 percent of deaths for children under the age of 4 are due to poor environmental conditions, such as sickness related to drinking polluted water or respiratory disease tied to breathing unsafe indoor air, she said.

One example of a low-cost policy change that would help more households gain access to clean drinking water is switching from providing long-term subsidies for water usage to helping people afford one-time, water-network connection fees, Kraham said.

Governments also could give communities more information about proper indoor ventilation, especially in homes that burn fossil fuels for heating and cooking, she added.

In the area of land rights and access, governments can improve their policy performance significantly by removing legal and bureaucratic administrative impediments that keep people -- particularly women and vulnerable populations -- from freely buying or renting land, according to a September 11 MCC press release.

"Experience tells us that landowners, especially farmers with secure land tenure, are more likely to make long-term investments and forgo immensely destructive practices such as deforestation and slash and burn agriculture, MCC Executive Director John Danilovich said.

The MCC is based on the principle that foreign aid is most effective when it reinforces good

governance, economic growth and spending on services that directly help people, such as education and health care.

The MCC board of directors is chaired by Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and includes Secretary of the Treasury Henry Paulson, U.S. Trade Representative Susan Schwab; U.S. Agency for International Development Administrator Randall Tobias, the MCC's Danilovich; and private-sector experts Christine Todd Whitman and Kenneth Hackett.

For fiscal year 2007, candidate countries must either have a maximum per capita income equal of \$1,675 gross national income to qualify for the "low income" category or a per capita income of between \$1,675 and \$3,465 to qualify for the "lower middle income" category, and not be subject to U.S. aid restrictions.

The press release
(http://www.mca.gov/public_affairs/press_releases/pr_091106_adopts.shtml)
and a fact sheet
(http://www.mca.gov/public_affairs/fact_sheets/Fact_Sheet_NRM_Indicator.pdf)
describing the new indicators are available on the MCC web site.

For additional information, see Millennium Challenge Account
(http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/economic_issues/mca.html).

For more information on U.S. development efforts, see Partnership for a Better Life
(<http://usinfo.state.gov/partners/>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/13/2006

Top U.S. Official for Africa Defends Darfur Peace Agreement

(State's Frazer decries Sudanese government's offensive)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Assistant Secretary of State for African Affairs Jendayi Frazer vigorously defended the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) from criticism that it is a failed attempt at diplomacy to stop the genocide that has killed more than 200,000 people since a rebellion flared up in the Sudanese province more than two years ago.

That violence, perpetrated mainly by groups of marauding militias called Jingawit and supported by the Sudanese government in Khartoum, was termed genocide by the U.S. government and continues despite a cease-fire agreed to by all sides more than two years ago.

The DPA, signed by representatives of the Sudanese government and major rebel factions on May 5, 2006, in Abuja, Nigeria, capped more than six months of talks toward ending the violence that also displaced more than 2 million Darfurians. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/May/06-121988.html>)).

The Sudanese government, led by President Omar al-Bashir, recently mounted an assault in northern Darfur on the rebel holdouts that have not signed the agreement. Some observers say this is an excuse by Khartoum to continue its campaign to depopulate that potentially resource-rich western province.

Speaking at a September 12 conference on Sudan and U.S. policy sponsored by the National Defense University (NDU), Frazer said, "There are some in our own country whom I think have irresponsibly stated that the DPA is a flawed document."

On the contrary, she said, "It is a good agreement" and offers a "fair deal" to all the parties involved.

"Most importantly," said Frazer, the DPA creates a vehicle through which "the rebels themselves and nonsignatories can come to the table and negotiate" with the [Sudanese] government "to achieve their ends through political means rather than killing innocent civilians, attacking humanitarian workers and attacking the African Union forces that are there [in Darfur] with no other reason than to save lives and protect civilians."

John Prendergast, Sudan program officer for the International Crisis Group based in Brussels, Belgium, told an NDU panel before Frazer spoke that he believed President Bashir was using the DPA as an excuse to mount a military campaign in Darfur. "Bashir can do this with impunity," he added, because the DPA failed to provide for monitoring by outside forces like the United Nations and therefore the document was "flawed" from the beginning as a peace agreement.

Bashir, on the other hand, has interpreted the Abuja agreement to allow operations in Darfur by his security forces, including an offensive against factions in the province that have not yet signed the agreement. Therefore, Bashir has said, calls by the United States and the U.N. Security Council to replace an African Union peacekeeping force in Darfur with 12,000 new troops are unnecessary and contrary to the DPA.

Frazer said Bashir was operating in "bad faith." She explained, "We believe that the [Sudanese] Government offensive is a violation of its obligations under the Darfur Peace Agreement" as well as under a previous cease-fire agreement.

In addition to the U.S. government's vigorous push for a U.N. peacekeeping force for Darfur, Frazer said, "We will continue to work on a political front with the nonsignatories to bring them on board to the DPA [because] the Sudanese government is basically using the nonsignatories as an excuse for attacking and launching its new offensive in Darfur."

Frazer reminded her audience that President Bush has said "there was no military solution to the crisis in Darfur and that we must extend the United Nation's Mission in Sudan mandate to protect innocent lives."

She said Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice spoke to the Sudanese foreign minister recently "making it very clear to his government that there is no prospect of improving bilateral relations with the United States as long as the crisis and killing in Darfur continue."

For more information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency
(<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

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09/14/2006

Aid Group Launches Program to Educate Children in Conflict Areas

(Program will be largest effort in long history of Save the Children)

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- The humanitarian assistance organization Save the Children announced a five-year program to bring education to children living in countries affected by armed conflict. The initiative was launched concurrently in more than 40 countries, according to a Save the Children press release.

The U.S.-based group announced the launch of its "Rewrite the Future" education initiative at a press briefing September 12 at the U.S. Capitol. The event was attended by members of Congress who support increasing educational opportunities for children around the world.

The goal of the initiative is to provide hope for the future for millions of children by helping them "gain access to and reap the current and future benefits of a quality education," according to the release. The program aims to bring basic education to 3 million young children by 2010 and provide improved education to 5 million more children by that time.

Charlie MacCormack, Save the Children chief executive officer, urged aid donors to expand their concept of how to respond to crises caused by war or natural disasters. That response traditionally is limited to providing emergency aid such as medicine, food and shelter. In addition, he said, "education has to be part of the normal response to a crisis."

Education is "a casualty of war," Save the Children said in its recent "Rewrite the Future" report.

"Students and teachers often have to flee as school buildings are bombed or commandeered by armed forces ... essential education money gets diverted towards military action, teachers' salaries dry up and materials stop reaching schools," the report states.

"Unless children affected by conflict are protected and educated, their future, and the future of their nations, are seriously imperiled," it adds.

Early investment in education protects children from the most damaging aspects of conflict -- such as being forced into militias, raped or subjected to other forms of abuse -- and is a significant factor in breaking the cycle of violence, building peace and helping countries get on a positive track for development, MacCormack said.

VALUING EDUCATION

"I value education a lot," said Mercy Acayo Aremo, a former refugee from Sudan now living and going to school in Baltimore, Maryland.

Children "are the leaders of the future," she said at the program's U.S. launch.

In a Save the Children public service film, Actress Eva Longoria said that "education can save our children and engage them in society. [It] offers hopes and teaches tolerance."

"Just as education is the ticket out of poverty, it is a means to achieving stability, security and prosperity" in areas that have been affected by conflict, Representative Nina Lowey said at the launch.

Education is for children who, for all or most of their lives, have "seen nothing but violence and bloodshed" and is "key to rebuilding shattered societies and for rehabilitating child soldiers," she said.

More information
(http://www.savethechildren.org/news/releases/release_091206.asp?stationpub=i_hpln_091206&ArticleID=&NewsID=) about Rewrite the Future is available on the Save the Children web site.

For additional information about how the U.S. government, groups and individuals are helping

people around the world, see Partnership for a Better Life (<http://usinfo.state.gov/partners/>).

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09/14/2006

U.S. Activists Plead for U.N. Action To End Suffering in Darfur

(Actor George Clooney, Nobel laureate Elie Weisel focus attention on crisis)

By Judy Aita
United Nations Correspondent

United Nations -- Nobel laureate Elie Wiesel and award-winning actor George Clooney pleaded with the Security Council September 14 to act decisively to end the suffering in Darfur.

Wiesel and Clooney were guests of the United States at a special Security Council meeting chaired by U.S. Ambassador John Bolton. The envoy said he hoped the appearance of the two famous human rights advocates would increase attention on the growing problem in Darfur and help amplify the importance of taking definitive action at the United Nations.

"Every day that passes more innocent men, women and children suffer there. Every day women and young girls are raped as they venture from refugee camps to find firewood. This problem cannot be dismissed as too complex to address," Bolton said.

Clooney, who visited refugee camps in Darfur in April, said he was meeting council members to be "the voice of the people who cannot speak for themselves." (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/Archive/2006/Apr/28-107228.html>).)

"My job is to come here today to beg you on behalf of the millions of people who will die -- and make no mistake they will die - - to take real and effective measures to put an end to this," Clooney said.

While acknowledging that the situation is politically complex, Clooney said, "when you see entire villages raped and killed, wells poisoned and then filled with the bodies of villagers, then all complexities disappear and it comes down to simply right and wrong."

The two activists focused on September 30 -- the date when 7,000 African Union (AU) peacekeepers will have to leave Darfur unless the government of Sudan agrees to allow the United Nations to increase the mission to 17,000 and begin taking over the operation. If the AU troops leave, humanitarian groups, which increasingly have been the targets of attacks, will be forced to abandon their work. Their departure would leave more than 2.5 million people without food and basic care. The United Nations has estimated that as many as 100,000 could die each month if international aid stops.

If there are no peacekeepers in Darfur after September 30, Clooney said, "You will simply need men with shovels and bleached white linen and headstones."

Both Wiesel and Clooney emphasized the Security Council's "responsibility to protect" those who cannot protect themselves. They reminded council members of the 1994 massacres in Rwanda where an estimated 800,000 were killed in sectarian violence while the United Nations stood by.

At the 2005 U.N. World Summit, nations agreed there is a collective international obligation to protect populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The council, world leaders said, must take decisive action if there is no peaceful alternative and a government is failing to do so.

"However you deal with it," Clooney told the 15-nation Security Council, "it will be on your watch."

"Sudan cannot bring back the dead but it can restore a sense of honor to the United Nations," Wiesel said.

MOVED TO DESPAIR

The two men, who represented thousands of activists around the world, went to the Security Council, "because more than any other [organization], you hold their destiny in your

hands You are the last political recourse of Darfur's victims and their friends," Wiesel said.

"We have come to you because I have been moved to despair. We tried everything we could. We knocked on doors, appealed to conscience, implored the wealthy and strong to help the weak and the poor. What else could we do that we haven't done yet," the Nobel laureate said.

Wiesel urged the council to be Darfur's "moral custodian" and stop the violence.

"You can. You can stop it. There are so many ways and you know them all. You have even accepted certain resolutions to that effect," Wiesel said, mentioning economic, political, and cultural sanctions and threatening those who order or carry out the murders with punishment.

Wiesel urged the United Nations to help the Africa Union continue its job. Send more troops "not to wage war but to give safe haven to those who need it," he said.

The United Nations "should not wait for Sudan's invitation" to send in peacekeepers, Wiesel said. "Go in anyway. The tormentors and assassins do not wait. The U.N. Charter asks you to intervene. In the name of all that is sacred be worthy of that mission."

Secretary-General Kofi Annan called the situation in Darfur desperate. "If the African Union forces were to leave, and we are not able to put in a U.N. follow-one force, we are heading for a disaster and I don't think we can allow that to happen," he said September 13.

Annan appealed to the U.N. member states to "put pressure" on Sudan to accept the U.N. peacekeepers.

For more information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency
(<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

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09/15/2006

U.N. Force Can Deploy to Sudan Without Government's Consent

(State's Silverberg says Secretary Rice will discuss Darfur at United Nations)

By Stephen Kaufman
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and other foreign ministers attending the opening of the 61st U.N. General Assembly in New York will hold a "meeting of key partners" to discuss the humanitarian situation in the Darfur region of Sudan and how to proceed with the U.N. peacekeeping operation there.

Speaking at the State Department September 15, Assistant Secretary of State for International Organization Affairs Kristen Silverberg said that at the meeting, scheduled to occur during the week of September 18, the foreign ministers "will commit all of our governments to take steps to end the violence."

Asked if it would be possible for a U.N. force to be deployed without the consent of the Sudanese government, Silverberg said, "It's absolutely the case" under the terms of U.N. Security Council Resolution 1706, which authorized the peacekeeping force.

She said the United States had insisted that "there be no language in the resolution that required the explicit endorsement of the Sudanese government."

"Obviously, we would like their cooperation and support. We think that the likelihood of ending the violence is much better if we have support and cooperation from the government of Sudan, but it's not required," she said.

Sudan has continued to resist calls for it to consent to the peacekeeping force, which has been charged with replacing the overburdened African Union mission in the Darfur region.

Silverberg added that the Bush administration is continuing to hold discussions and work with the Sudanese government in order to "encourage their cooperation and consent," to the U.N. peacekeepers.

The purpose of Secretary Rice's meeting in New York will be to "call attention to the situation on the ground, [and] to talk about next steps," concerning how to deploy the peacekeeping operation "as soon as possible," how to strengthen the existing African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), and "how we can recommit all of our governments to take collective action, the full international community, to end the violence."

She said that there would be more to report after the meeting, but said "we expect this meeting to move the ball."

The U.N. Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) already has had "concrete conversations" with many countries about their willingness to contribute to the force, and Silverberg said she believes "the troops are out there."

However, a number of issues remain, "including will they [the peacekeepers] go into a permissive environment, a semi-permissive environment, or a hostile environment?"

At the United Nations, U.S. Ambassador John Bolton said September 15 that the United States is "gravely concerned over the deteriorating humanitarian situation in Darfur," including the possibility of new refugee flows into Chad, and a weak implementation of the region's Comprehensive Peace Agreement. He also expressed regret over the recent deaths of humanitarian workers.

"We must find a way to help reach a cessation of hostilities in Darfur, to help provide security for the civilians there, and to support a process of dialogue rather than use of arms," he said. "We look forward to the outcome of next week's meeting of the African Union Peace and Security Council and reiterate our call on the Government of Sudan to welcome deployment of a U.N. peacekeeping force in Darfur."

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

(...)

A transcript (<http://www.state.gov/p/io/rls/72344.htm>) of Silverberg's briefing is available on the State Department Web site.

For additional information about U.S. policy, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNG_2005.html).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

Bush Calls for U.N. Force to Enter Sudan, Stop Genocide

(Also says Iran should not be allowed to "wait out" the international community)

By Stephen Kaufman
Washington File White House Correspondent

Washington -- President Bush called on the United Nations to take "robust action" in Sudan and deploy a peacekeeping force to provide security in the troubled Darfur regions.

The United Nations' lack of action against the genocide in Darfur has been a source of frustration for him and other Americans, the president said during a September 15 press conference at the White House.

Bush said there are "other alternatives" to continuing to wait for the Sudanese government to invite the peacekeepers into the country, such as "passing a resolution saying we're coming in with a U.N. force in order to save lives."

"I'm frustrated with the United Nations in regards to Darfur," Bush said. "I have said and this government has said there's genocide taking place in the Sudan, and it breaks our collective hearts to know that."

The president said the best way to solve the crisis is to have both a political and a security track in the country, and said he had suggested that NATO provide support and logistics help for the U.N. force.

However, he said, the United Nations "hasn't acted," and added, "I can understand why those who are concerned about Darfur are frustrated. I am."

Bush said he was proud of U.S. humanitarian efforts in Sudan. "We provided by far the vast majority of food and aid," but said he is troubled by reports of escalating violence. "I can understand the desperation people feel for women being pulled out of these refugee centers and raped. And now is the time for the U.N. to act," he said.

For additional information, see Darfur Humanitarian Emergency (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/africa/darfur.html>).

(...)

A transcript (<http://www.whitehouse.gov/news/releases/2006/09/20060915-2.html>) of the president's press conference is available on the White House Web site.

For additional information, see The United States and the United Nations (http://usinfo.state.gov/is/international_security/UNG_2005.html).

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09/15/2006

Reforms Earning Countries Higher Incomes, World Bank Reports

(New governance indicators released ahead of annual Bank/IMF meetings)

By Kathryn McConnell
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Countries that invest in reforming their government can expect significant development gains and increased per capita incomes, the World Bank says.

In a September 15 press release on Governance Matters V: Worldwide Governance Indicators 1996-2005, Daniel Kaufmann, the bank's director of global governance, said reforming countries are finding that "good governance" is being recognized by foreign investors, aid donors, government officials and citizens "as crucial to higher living standards and poverty alleviation."

"Where there is resolute leadership and reform, improved governance outcomes can take place quickly," the bank said.

More and more aid organizations -- including the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) -- are using these indicators to make aid allocation decisions, it said.

The announcement of the governance indicators precedes the annual meetings of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund (IMF) September 19-20 in Singapore. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=September&x=20060912132016SAikceinawz0.2876856>).)

At the meetings, the bank will present new initiatives for fighting corruption and increasing the focus on results.

Other key issues expected to receive attention at the meetings are progress toward development in Africa, and how better to engage civil society and youth in development decision-making, according to the bank.

GOVERNANCE

In 2005, \$4.5 billion -- nearly half of all new World Bank aid to developing countries -- included support for strengthening governance in areas such as tax and customs administration; rule of law; judicial and civil service performance; and effective and accountable provision of services by local and central governments, the bank said.

Increasingly, the bank is supporting the development of independent media and strengthening parliaments, it said.

The bank also used the governance indicators to evaluate more than 200 countries in such areas

as adoption of reforms in government transparency, accountability and effectiveness, political stability, regulatory quality, quality of contract enforcement and measuring the abuse of power.

The bank cited Botswana, Ghana, Senegal, Sierra Leone, Mozambique and Liberia as making notable governance reforms during the past decade. Other poor countries, such as Slovenia, Chile and Estonia, score higher on rule of law and control of corruption than some industrialized countries, notably Greece and Italy, it said.

The World Bank is the largest provider of development assistance to Africa, doubling its aid between 2000 and 2005, according to reports.

The bank's strategy for helping Africa focuses on measurable results in expanding growth, trade and economic competitiveness, promoting private-sector job creation, promoting regional integration and cooperation, reducing and mitigating conflicts, and improving governance.

CIVIL SOCIETY AND YOUTH

The bank said that over the past two decades it has increased greatly its cooperation with civil-society organizations, which are involved with an estimated 72 percent of new projects financed by the World Bank.

The civil-society sector promotes public-sector accountability and transparency, and ensures that poor and marginalized people are heard by governments and are factored into development policy decisions, the bank said.

Civil society includes nongovernmental and charitable organizations, private foundations, faith-based groups, trade unions and indigenous groups.

The bank's investments in youth programs also doubled between 2000 and 2005.

To ensure that young people have a good start in life, the bank and the international community increasingly are working to incorporate into their policies the views of youths in order to improve their current lives and their future, it said.

Donors now are engaged in addressing "second generation services" for youth -- those beyond basic health care and education -- by seeking more information that will help them shape policies on such issues as unemployment, high rates of HIV/AIDS infection, and risky behaviors, the bank added.

Young people make up the fastest growing segment of the world population and 50 percent of the population of poor countries, according to the bank.

Additional information
(<http://www.govindicators.org/>) about
governance indicators is available on the World
Bank Web site.

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau
of International Information Programs, U.S.
Department of State. Web site:
<http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

China Has Sophisticated Energy Strategy for Africa, Expert Says

(Analyst cites partnerships between China,
African oil companies)

By Jim Fisher-Thompson
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- In its need for more fuel to supply an expanding economy, China is pursuing a dynamic "holistic" approach to energy partnerships in Africa that has surprised many Western competitors, says South African Warrick Davies-Webb.

Davies-Webb, political analyst at Executive Research Associates, a risk-management consulting firm headquartered in Pretoria, South Africa, spoke at a September 13 briefing sponsored by the African Center for Strategic Studies (ACSS), a U.S. government agency located at Fort McNair near downtown Washington.

Established in 1999, ACSS sponsors seminars and training sessions for African midlevel military officers and defense officials. It recently opened an office in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, to

oversee programs on the continent aimed at increasing the professional skill of African militaries while building closer ties with U.S. counterparts in the defense community.

With oil, gas and coal use far outstripping its productive capacity, "China faces a growing energy deficit that has great implications for Africa," Davies-Webb told his ACSS audience. Africa has become a "new terrain for energy battles" in which Chinese state oil companies seek "to lock in energy supplies throughout the continent."

Their approach has become surprisingly sophisticated over the past 10 years, leading to partnerships with African state oil companies that now account for more than 10 percent of China's total oil imports, Davies-Webb said. During that period, China invested more than \$4 billion in Sudan alone, he said.

As late as 2000, China's only energy presence was in Sudan, but today its involvement on the continent includes refineries in Algeria and Libya, pipeline construction in Sudan and Nigeria, oil production in Angola and exploration rights in Guinea-Bissau, as well as a number of other sub-Saharan African nations, Davies-Webb said.

In 2006 alone, China paid \$2.2 billion for exploration rights in a field off Nigeria's coast, and is "aggressively" expanding exploration of offshore fields in Angola, he added.

China's new "holistic approach" -- offering exploration, development and financing packages to its African partners -- is an "attractive competitive alternative to traditional Western companies" who do not have a similar "integrated package of carrots to offer," the analyst said.

For African nations in financial trouble or unwilling to meet the transparency and accountability requirements of the World Bank and other international lenders, a Chinese deal literally can mean an "alternative economic lifeline."

In 2003, when Angola "found itself facing a severe cash crisis, China stepped in with a \$2 billion loan the next year that bailed that country out." In Chad, where international lenders threatened to withdraw support from its new

pipeline, "the Chinese were willing to offer an alternative package of technical assistance, if World Bank discussions broke off," Davies-Webb added.

Unlike U.S. government development agencies like the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Chinese do not focus on human rights, anti-corruption or economic reform as requirements for their support, the analyst explained. This is a distinct draw to nations like Zimbabwe and Sudan, against whom the U.S. government, the European Union and the United Nations have imposed sanctions because of human rights violations.

At the same time, U.S. law has tightened up rules against corruption for American businesses operating overseas. The day Davies-Webb spoke, a former executive for the Houston-based energy company, Willbros Group Incorporated, pleaded guilty to violating the U.S. Foreign Corrupt Practices Act by conspiring to bribe officials in Nigeria and Ecuador and might face prison time.

On the macroeconomic level, "since all major economic decisions in China are made on a political level by the government and Communist Party, all deals are backed by them. Therefore, Chinese companies enjoy risk-free access to African markets; an advantage Western companies just don't have," the analyst added.

Entry into Chad's fledgling oil sector is a good example of the overall Chinese approach, where "you have had massive [Chinese] institutional support that includes trade, foreign aid packages," Davies-Webb said.

In addition, the Chinese also have fostered "strategic linkages" with small African oil companies that have political influence in places like Nigeria, for example, and with companies and banks in Portugal that have connections in countries like Angola.

Davies-Webb said the Chinese also have "piggybacked" on Nigerian oil companies going into Sao Tome and Principe offshore oil fields, while they have employed South African businessmen with influence in Angola "as useful Trojan horses to gain access to key political players" in that oil-rich country.

Portugal has played a "critical but very underestimated role" in facilitating oil deals for the Chinese, who regard the European nation as "their back door into the African oil sector," the analyst remarked.

China also has gone out of its way to cultivate relations with France, Davies-Webb said, because of that nation's traditional business relationship with many African nations and the belief that the French pose "a counterweight to U.S. influence" on the continent.

See also "China No Threat to United States in Africa, U.S. Official Says (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2005/Jul/29-550683.html>)" and "China's Economic Focus on Africa is Mixed Picture, Scholar Says (<http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/Archive/2006/Jun/26-336377.html>)."

For more information on U.S. policy, see The United States and China (http://usinfo.state.gov/eap/east_asia_pacific/china.html), Africa (<http://usinfo.state.gov/af/>) and Trade and Economics (<http://usinfo.state.gov/ei/>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

Text: Executive Summary of the State Department Religious Freedom Report

(U.S. seeks to promote freedom of religion, conscience throughout the world)

(Begin text)

International Religious Freedom Report 2006

Released by the Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights and Labor
U.S. Department of State
September 15, 2006

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Annual Report

The purpose of this report is to document the actions of governments — those that repress religious expression, persecute innocent believers, or tolerate violence against religious minorities, as well as those that respect, protect, and promote religious freedom. We strive to report equally on abuses against adherents of all religious traditions and beliefs. The governments we report on range from those that provided a high level of protection for religious freedom in the broadest sense (those that "generally respected" religious freedom) to totalitarian regimes that sought to control religious thought and expression and regarded some or all religious groups as threats.

The promotion of religious freedom is a core objective of U.S. foreign policy and is part of the U.S. Department of State's mission. The commitment of the United States to religious freedom and to international human rights standards is also articulated in such documents as Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which clearly states that everyone has the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion. As an expression of our deep national commitment to these freedoms, the department monitors religious persecution and discrimination worldwide, recommends and implements policies directed toward regions and countries, and develops programs to promote religious freedom. Through transformational diplomacy, the United States seeks to promote freedom of religion and conscience throughout the world as a fundamental human right and as a source of stability for all countries. In so doing, it strives to assist newly formed democracies in implementing freedom of religion and conscience, assist religious and human rights NGOs in promoting religious freedom, and identify and promote changes in the policies and actions of regimes that severely persecute their citizens or others on the basis of religious belief.

The large majority of the world's people have religious beliefs, which they hold dear. It is because religion is viewed by people as having such a central place in their lives that many regard religious freedom as the most important right. At the same time, global trends, regional distinctions, local preferences, and personal histories often lead to significant overlap between religious identity and ethnicity, class, language group, or political affiliation. The right to religious freedom can be abused in many ways both blatant and subtle. The following

typology, although far from exhaustive, represents the major types of abuses identified in this report, and may serve as a helpful guide to assessing trends in religious freedom: totalitarian/authoritarian regimes, state hostility toward minority religions, state neglect of societal discrimination, discriminatory legislation that favors majority religions, and denunciation of certain religions as cults.

The first and most stark category of abuses is seen in totalitarian and authoritarian regimes, which seek to control religious thought and expression. Such regimes regard some or all religious groups as enemies of the state because of their religious beliefs or their independence from central authority. Some governments are hostile and repressive towards particular groups, often identifying them as "security threats." It is important to distinguish between groups of religious believers who express legitimate political grievances, and those that misuse religion to advocate violence against other religious groups or the state. This report documents it as an abuse when a government broadly represses religious expression among a peacefully practicing population on the grounds of security concerns. For example, the war on terror must not be used as an excuse to repress peaceful worship. The report also notes those countries and situations in which authorities' over-zealous actions taken against observant believers suspected of extremism have had the principal effect of restricting religious freedom. In some countries, for example, many are afraid to attend mosque frequently lest the government characterize them as religious extremists.

A second category of abuses occurs with state hostility toward minority or non- approved religions. These governments implement policies designed to demand that adherents recant their faith, cause religious group members to flee the country, or intimidate and harass certain religious groups. This report notes, for example, when state repression of religious groups was linked to ethnic identity because a government dominated by a majority ethnic group suppressed the faith of a minority group. Also detailed in this report are instances where governments used an individual's religious devotion as a proxy for determining his or her political ideology, which resulted in the intimidation and harassment of certain religious groups.

Yet a third kind of abuse stems from a state's failure to address either societal discrimination or societal abuses against religious groups. In these countries, legislation may discourage religious discrimination and persecution, but officials fail to prevent conflicts, harassment, or other harmful acts against minority religious groups. Protecting religious freedom is not just a matter of having good laws in writing. It requires active work by a government at all levels to prevent abuses by governmental or private actors, to bring abusers to justice, and to provide redress to victims, when appropriate. Governments have the responsibility to ensure that their agents do not commit abuses of religious freedom, and to protect religious freedom by rule of law in a way that ensures that private actors obey. In addition, governments must foster an environment of respect and tolerance for all people. This report documents cases in which a government has failed to prevent violations of religious freedom, or has not responded with consistency and vigor to violations of religious freedom by private actors, nongovernmental entities, or local law enforcement officials.

In a fourth category are abuses that occur when governments have enacted discriminatory legislation or policies that favor majority religions and disadvantage minority religions. This often results from historical dominance by the majority religion and a bias against new or minority religions. In a number of these countries, governments have acted on a widely held ideology that links national identity with a particular religion by enacting legislation that favors the majority religion and discriminates against minority religions. Though the majority of the population in such a country may worship without harassment, such a situation cannot be characterized as true freedom to choose one's faith and worship freely. Furthermore, government backing of a religion can result in restrictions even on worshippers in the majority when the state enforces only one interpretation of that religion.

Finally, the practice of discriminating against certain religions by identifying them as dangerous cults or sects is a common type of abuse, even in countries where religious freedom is otherwise respected. For example, this report discusses denunciations against Shi'ite Muslims in Sunni-majority countries, and

vice versa, especially where governments have taken it upon themselves to regulate religious belief and practice according to one of these faith traditions.

Between July 1, 2005, and June 30, 2006, the period covered by this report, wide ranging events had implications for religious freedom. One trend was a significant increase in international media attention to religious freedom issues and controversies. Such events included an international backlash in February 2006 against the republication of a series of twelve cartoons depicting satirical images of Mohammed, originally published in September 2005 by the Danish newspaper Jyllands-Posten. In choosing to publish them, the European media cited freedom of expression. However, many observers, especially in Europe's minority Muslim communities, interpreted this as a direct attack on or demonstration of intolerance toward the Islamic faith.

The remainder of this Executive Summary consists of two parts. Part I summarizes, on a country-by-country basis, actions the U.S. government has taken to advance international religious freedom in the nations designated "Countries of Particular Concern" for particularly severe violations of religious freedom. Part II provides a summary of conditions in those countries where religious freedom is of significant interest, including in Countries of Particular Concern. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies, and gives examples of particular government abuses or positive steps governments have taken to promote or protect religious freedom. In most cases, these countries exhibit one or more of the abuses outlined above.

PART I: U.S. ACTIONS IN COUNTRIES OF PARTICULAR CONCERN

The International Religious Freedom Act of 1998 (IRF Act) requires an annual review of the status of religious freedom worldwide and the designation of countries that have "engaged in or tolerated particularly severe violations of religious freedom" during the reporting period as "Countries of Particular Concern" (CPCs). Following the designation, a period of negotiation may ensue, in which the United States seeks to work with a designated country to bring about change. Subsequently, depending

upon the results of these discussions, one or more actions are chosen by the secretary of state, as required by the IRF Act. These actions range from sanctions to an agreement to a waiver. In countries where U.S. sanctions are currently in force, the secretary may designate one or more of these sanctions jointly to fulfill the requirements of the IRF Act and other U.S. law. The ambassador at large for international religious freedom and his office take actions to promote religious freedom in each CPC throughout the year. This section highlights actions by other U.S. government officials to promote religious freedom and to encourage the governments to take positive steps to increase religious freedom. In November 2005, the secretary re-designated Burma, China, North Korea, Iran, Sudan, Eritrea, Saudi Arabia, and Vietnam as CPCs. Further details on U.S. actions in CPCs and other countries may be found in each individual country report.

Eritrea

The secretary of state first designated Eritrea as a CPC in 2004. As the action under the IRF Act, in 2005 the secretary of state ordered the denial of commercial export to Eritrea of any defense articles and services controlled under the Arms Export Control Act, excluding certain items such as those used for peacekeeping and anti-terrorism efforts. U.S. embassy officials meet regularly with leaders of the religious community. The U.S. ambassador and other embassy officers have raised the cases of detention and restrictions on unregistered religious groups with officials in the President's Office, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Justice, and the leaders of the sole legal political party, the People's Front for Democracy and Justice.

Sudan

Every year since 1999, the secretary of state has designated Sudan a CPC. Among the numerous U.S. sanctions against Sudan, in 2005 the secretary continued the designation of one sanction consisting of the use of the voice and vote of the U.S. to abstain on or oppose loans or other uses of the funds of the international financial institutions to or for Sudan, pursuant to the International Financial Institutions Act, as the action under the IRF Act. The U.S. government encouraged the Government of National Unity (GNU) to fulfill the

promises of religious freedom made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Interim National Constitution, and made clear that restrictions on religious freedom impede improved relations between the United States and Sudan. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Zoellick hosted an interfaith forum with Christian and Muslim leaders in Khartoum during his November 2005 visit. Embassy officials frequently met with leaders of different religious groups. The U.S. embassy has developed working relationships with a number of Muslim and Christian leaders, and U.S. officials met on a regular basis with such leaders in Khartoum, Juba, and on trips outside the capital.

PART II: COUNTRY-SPECIFIC CONDITIONS OF INTERNATIONAL RELIGIOUS FREEDOM

This section provides a summary of conditions in a number of countries where religious freedom is of significant interest. For each country, this section notes the legal situation and relevant policies, and gives examples of particular government abuses or positive steps governments have taken in the reporting period to promote or protect religious freedom.

Egypt

The Egyptian constitution provides for freedom of belief and the practice of religious rites, although the Government places restrictions on these rights in practice. Religious practices that conflict with the Government's interpretation of Shari'a, or Islamic law, are prohibited. Members of the non-Muslim religious minorities officially recognized by the Egyptian Government generally worship without harassment; however, tradition and some aspects of the law discriminated against religious minorities, including Christians and particularly Baha'is, which are not recognized legally. The Government continued to deny civil documents, including identity cards, birth certificates, and marriage licenses, to members of the Baha'i community, which numbers 500 to 2,000 persons. It appealed an April 4 decision by the administrative court, that supported the right of Baha'i citizens to receive ID cards and birth certificates with religion noted on the documents. Many churches continued to encounter difficulty with obtaining permits for church repair and rebuilding, despite a presidential decree in December 2005 stating that such permits, previously requiring his

approval, could be granted by provincial governors. In the past, the Government did not provide a legal means for converts from Islam to Christianity to amend their civil records to reflect their new religious status. Over the past two years, approximately thirty-two Muslims who had converted from Christianity have been issued verdicts allowing them to recover their original Christian identities. Metwalli Ibrahim Metwalli Saleh, arrested by the State Security Intelligence Service (SSIS) in May 2003, apparently for his views on Islam, including support of the right to convert, was released on April 23 after receiving eight separate rulings from the Supreme State Security Emergency Court in his favor and an official statement from the state security prosecutor ordering his release.

Eritrea

Religious freedom did not improve overall, and in some areas deteriorated further. The Eritrean Government severely restricts freedom of religion for groups that it has not registered, and infringes upon the independence of some registered groups. Following a 2002 decree that religious groups must register, the Government closed all religious facilities not belonging to the country's four principal religious institutions: the Eritrean Orthodox Church, the Roman Catholic Church, the Evangelical (Lutheran) Church of Eritrea, and Islam. The Government continued to harass, arrest, and detain members of independent Evangelical groups (including Pentecostals), Jehovah's Witnesses, and a reform movement within the Eritrean Orthodox Church. The Government also intervened in procedural and administrative decisions of the Eritrean Orthodox Church by displacing the patriarch in favor of its own candidate. The Government failed to register any of the four religious groups who applied in 2002 for registration, and it restricted religious meetings and arrested individuals during religious ceremonies, gatherings, and prayer meetings. There were also reports of forced recantations. Some religious detainees were held in harsh conditions that included extreme temperature fluctuations with limited or no access to family.

Sudan

The 2005 Interim National Constitution provides for freedom of religion throughout the entire country, and there was some improvement in

the status of respect for religious freedom in the period covered by this report. However, regional distinctions in the constitution, negotiated as part of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), have resulted in disparities in the treatment of religious minorities in the North and the South. The Interim National Constitution preserved Shari'a as a source of legislation in states outside southern Sudan, but recognized "popular consensus" and "the values and the customs of the people of Sudan, including their traditions and religious beliefs", as sources of legislation in the South. The Government of Southern Sudan generally respected the rights of Christians and Muslims in the ten states of the south as provided for in its separate interim constitution, signed on December 5, 2005, but the new Government of National Unity (GNU) continued to place restrictions on Christians in the North, particularly by denying building permits for new churches. The national government required that all students in the North study Islam in school, regardless of whether they were Muslim, and even if enrolled in private, Christian schools. The Interim National Constitution calls for the establishment of a Commission for the Rights of Non-Muslims in the capital, Khartoum, to ensure that non-Muslims are not adversely affected by the application of Shari'a law there, but that had not taken place by the end of the period covered by this report. Relations among religious groups improved during the reporting period. Dialogue between Christian and Muslim groups continued under the auspices of the Sudan Inter-Religious Council (SIRC), a nongovernmental organization supported by the Government of National Unity, and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC), comprising Catholic, Orthodox, and Protestant groups. The SIRC supported peace and reconciliation efforts between Christians and Muslims, sponsoring a conference on the role of religious leaders in peace building with the U.S. Institute of Peace in July 2005.

09/15/2006

Community Radio Helps Manage Conflict in Mali

(Partnership for a Better Life)

Mali is threatened by regional and tribal conflict, has some religious extremist groups with

possible ties to terrorist organizations, and has a large cohort of disaffected youth and ex-combatants stemming from the Northern Peace Accord of 1996.

The nomadic populations of northern Mali remain largely isolated and are often excluded from full participation in decisions that affect their lives. In light of these factors, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) is establishing and maintaining contact by radio while providing services for the nomadic population. Radio has proven to be the most cost-effective means of delivering vital information on health, nutrition, education, and peace and democracy.

Specifically, through its Conflict Management through Community Radio Program, USAID is establishing 10 FM radio stations that will reach an estimated 385,000 people in Mali's north.

Although a relatively new program, the simple promise of radio service already has helped develop bonds between two communities characterized by long-standing conflict.

USAID identified the town of Tarinkit, with a predominately Touareg population, and the town of Almoustarat, predominately Arab, as possible sites for a radio station. Almoustarat was selected as the most viable location.

This decision caused immediate dismay among leaders of the Touareg and led to debate among the leaders of Almoustarat. USAID made it clear that the two communities had to come to an agreement or the station would be installed in another town.

But everyone wanted the radio service. First, the Touareg met. Then the Touareg and Arabs came together to discuss the issue. The conclusion: citizens and local authorities agreed on Almoustarat as the site.

Members of the two communities were astonished at what they had been able to achieve. It was the first time residents of the district had collaborated on anything. They made decisions that ensured that both communities would benefit from the presence of the radio -- they worked together to build the station, and selected radio staff and a steering committee on which both communities were represented fairly.

The activity and preparations have had a profound impact on conflict management in the area.

"We are very grateful to the "prefect" and his delegation for their mediation efforts in what would have been a useless misunderstanding ... over the radio issue.

"We now feel happy to have been educated on this problem. Our council was elected based on consensus. Therefore, we wish ... all actions to be initiated and based on consensus," said Sidalamine Ag Doho, district council vice president.

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

Insecticide DDT Returns to the Anti-Malarial Arsenal

(U.S. malaria prevention initiative will support indoor spraying of DDT)

Washington – The World Health Organization (WHO) announced September 15 new guidelines to promote the indoor use of the pesticide DDT as a means to prevent malaria, a disease that takes more than 1 million lives a year.

Widespread use of DDT was discontinued in the 1960s after it was found that the pesticide was a persistent organic pollutant having great longevity in the environment and causing damage to other life forms. That decision had a public health consequence in malaria endemic areas where local officials were deprived of one of their best tools to control mosquitoes and prevent malaria.

Re-evaluation of the use of the insecticide now reveals that the use of this substance indoors in a controlled manner will better protect people from mosquitoes and the malaria parasites they carry without broadcasting the pesticide in the environment at large.

"Indoor residual spraying (IRS) is useful to quickly reduce the number of infections caused by malaria-carrying mosquitoes, said Dr. Anarfi

Asamoah-Bah, WHO's assistant director-general for HIV/AIDS, TB and Malaria. "IRS has proven to be just as cost effective as other malaria prevention measures, and DDT presents no health risk when used properly."

Indoor residual spraying involves spraying the inside walls of a dwelling so that a residue of insecticide remains and offers long-term protection against disease-causing bugs. Studies show that correct and timely use of indoor residual spraying can reduce malaria transmission by up to 90 percent.

"Indoor spraying is like providing a huge mosquito net over an entire household for around-the-clock protection," said U.S. Senator Tom Coburn, a Republican from Oklahoma who is a leading advocate for global malaria control efforts.

Even prior to this WHO decision about DDT use, a number of malaria-ridden nations – India and South Africa among them – had adopted indoor residual spraying with success. The WHO announcement likely will open the door for more nations to adopt this strategy for the prevention of malaria, a disease widely recognized as an impediment to development and advancement because of its disproportionate effect on poor nations. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060801112833cmretrop0.3886682>).)

"I anticipate that all 15 of the country programs of President Bush's \$1.2 billion commitment to cut malaria deaths in half will include substantial indoor residual spraying activities, including many that will use DDT," said Admiral R. Timothy Ziemer, coordinator of the President's Malaria Initiative. "Because it is relatively inexpensive and very effective, USAID supports the spraying of homes with insecticides as a part of a balanced, comprehensive malaria prevention and treatment program."

President Bush announced the President's Malaria Initiative (PMI) in June 2005. It is a \$1.2 billion, five-year collaboration of several government agencies that attempts to take a comprehensive approach to preventing and treating malaria. The program aims to reduce malaria in Africa by 50 percent by 2010. Seven high-risk African nations currently are targeted,

and 15 ultimately will be included. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/xarchives/display.html?p=washfile-english&y=2006&m=August&x=20060825160531cmretrop0.9974176>).)

The distribution of bed nets to protect families from mosquitoes while sleeping is another low-tech solution in the effort to reduce malaria. More effective medicines also are becoming available to replace older drugs to which the malaria parasites have become resistant.

For ongoing coverage of this issue, see Health (http://usinfo.state.gov/gi/global_issues/health.html).

(Distributed by the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

Reporters Can Keep News Fresh, Accurate Despite Obstacles

(Online discussion with reporters in Kampala examines role of journalists)

By Carolee Walker
Washington File Staff Writer

Washington -- Journalists must want to change the way their work is perceived to establish credibility with their audience, said veteran journalist Deborah Potter who hosted a State Department-sponsored webchat with participants in Kampala, Uganda, on September 15.

"It would help if journalists would agree on some professional standards and publicize them so the audience can hold them accountable if they fall short," Potter said.

Potter is executive director of NewsLab, an online resource center for journalists she founded in 1998.

Journalists should be fair-minded, Potter said. "They have to be able to put aside their own beliefs and listen to those of others so they can fairly represent them in the media. They have to

care, deeply, about accuracy and be willing to check and re-check information to make sure they have it right."

For example, in situations where governments, media owners or sponsors try to influence journalists' news coverage, journalists should recognize that an independent press is a goal, not a given.

"Instead of divorcing themselves from competing interests," Potter said, "journalists need to be aware of them and to ask themselves how they can report every story in an independent way."

It is difficult to maintain the energy and passion for reporting when journalists are so often thwarted, Potter said. "One thing that can keep you fresh is working on a project or story that you care deeply about. You still have to do your daily work, but if you can also do a little bit along the way on a story that matters to you, you can keep the passion alive."

Journalists should seek support from their colleagues because "press freedom is always a moving target," she said. Journalists want more of it, and because it can be difficult to secure, Potter said, journalists are uncomfortable lobbying for legislative change. It is helpful to organize local journalism groups that can take on this task, she suggested.

Some news media organizations in the United States, for example, have devoted one week each year to reporting on freedom of information. (See related article (<http://usinfo.state.gov/journals/itdhr/0800/ijde/sc hmuhl.htm>).)

Radio is the most economical source of news and information in Uganda, with the widest coverage, but most radio stations allot only a few minutes for news, according to a webchat participant. Potter, who said radio newsrooms are often understaffed everywhere, suggested that to keep news fresh and accurate throughout the day, radio journalists need to collect new information.

"This sounds obvious, but it's amazing how often this basic requirement is ignored," Potter said. "Even if you don't have a staff of reporters you can send into the field during the day, you need a way to get new information on the air. If you can reach people by telephone and record your

calls you can get fresh 'sound bites' on the news. At a minimum, radio presenters should be rewriting their newscasts every hour to keep the information fresh," Potter said.

Potter said journalists writing for online media think differently about their stories from the start. "The medium really does change the message," she said. For example, online news consumers are looking for many different things, including interactive elements, graphics, maps, video or slide shows. Reporters do not need to be experts at producing online elements, Potter said, but they need to understand what can be done to enhance their stories.

Online readers are "skimmers," Potter said, cautioning reporters to resist the temptation to write long stories for online use.

Prior to establishing NewsLab, Potter was a network correspondent for CBS News and CNN, covering the White House, State Department, Congress, national politics and environmental issues for more than 20 years.

For more information, see Potter's State Department publication, *The Handbook of Independent Journalism* (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>), which covers the basics of how to research, write and edit a story, compose headlines, choose graphics and select quotes and sound bites.

Additional information on NewsLab (<http://www.newslab.org/>) is available on its Web site.

A transcript (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Archive/2006/Sep/15-326531.html>) of Potter's discussion and information on upcoming webchats is available on Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>).

(The Washington File is a product of the Bureau of International Information Programs, U.S. Department of State. Web site: <http://usinfo.state.gov>)

09/15/2006

Transcript: Journalists Discusses Challenges, Pressures in Reporting the News

(USINFO Webchat transcript, September 15)

Deborah Potter, an executive director of NewsLab (an online resource center for journalists in Washington that she founded in 1998) and a featured columnist, responds to questions in a September 15 USINFO Webchat about the fundamentals of journalism as it is practiced in a democratic system.

Following is the transcript:

(Begin transcript)

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF STATE
Bureau of International Information Programs
USINFO Webchat Transcript

Guest: Deborah Potter
Date: September 15, 2006
Time: 9:00 a.m. EDT (1300 GMT)

Deborah Potter and Ugandan Journalists

IIP Moderator: Welcome to our USINFO Webchat with Ms. Deborah Potter. Our webchat will begin in just a few minutes at 9:00 a.m. Washington/4:00 p.m. Kampala time.

We are already receiving your questions. Please submit each question separately.

Deborah Potter: Good day to everyone in Kampala. Thanks for inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

Question [Zubedah]: Hello Deborah, what tips can you give on professionalizing broadcast journalism in developing countries, which at the moment is looked at more as a source of entertainment than a provider for credible news and information? - Zubedah

Answer [Deborah Potter]: This is a difficult issue to solve. First, the journalists themselves have to want to change the way their work is perceived. Then they need the support of their managers and, I think, some training. It is difficult to establish or regain credibility with an audience that doesn't expect it. But I think it can be done,

over time. It would help if journalists would agree on some professional standards and publicize them so the audience can hold them accountable if they fall short.

Q [Zubedah]: In Uganda, Radio seems to be the cheapest source of news and information and is also said to have the widest coverage in terms of audience. The problem is that most radio stations, which are mainly commercialised, tend to allocate a maximum of 5 minutes for news which lacks freshness and quality content as the day goes by. In your opinion, how best can radio news be made more interesting without necessarily shortening it? - Zubedah

A: Radio is a terrific medium for reaching a wide audience, but radio newsrooms are often understaffed. To keep the news fresh and interesting throughout the day, radio journalists have to collect new information. This sounds obvious, but it's amazing how often this basic requirement is ignored. Even if you don't have a staff of reporters you can send into the field during the day, you need a way to get new information on the air. If you can reach people by telephone and record your calls you can get fresh "sound bites" on the news. At a minimum, radio presenters should be rewriting their newscasts every hour to keep the information fresh.

Q [Geoffrey]: Uganda's media enjoy some press freedom. However, the state has intentionally maintained oppressive laws, though applied selectively. Laws like sedition, prohibition of importation of publications, the 1995 press and media statute and lately the terrorism act under which a journalist can be sentenced to death. The media has for the last 20 years of NRM rule not managed to have those laws scrapped.

What is your advice/comment on this?

A: Press freedom is always a moving target. Journalists want more of it, but it's difficult to secure. One problem, I think, is that journalists are either too busy doing their daily jobs or are uncomfortable with the idea of lobbying for legislative change, so they just make do with the current situation. It's helpful to organize local journalism groups that can take on this task. My guess is that government entities don't respond particularly well to being chastised about this by outside groups.

If possible, try to get the public involved in supporting greater press freedom. News media in the United States, for example, have devoted one week each year for the past several years to reporting on freedom of information. You can learn more about that at www.sunshineweek.org (<http://www.sunshineweek.org/>).

Q [Henry]: Hi Deborah and all colleagues in Uganda. First, thanks to Deborah for writing that wonderful guide.

A: Thanks so much, Henry. I am glad you are finding it useful.

IIP Moderator: Ms. Potter is the author of the State Department's new "Handbook of Independent Journalism (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/index.htm>)." The handbook is available free online in HTML and PDF (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/journalism/journalism.pdf>) format.

Q [Henry]: I can't agree more with almost everything that Deborah says in her book, except to ask, Why shouldn't Editors themselves get time off once in a while to report?

A: I think that's a great idea, as well. In fact, I've recommended to many newsrooms that they institute a kind of "job swapping" arrangement so people can experience how other people do their jobs. It can be eye-opening for a reporter to see what editors go through, and it can be a good reminder to editors of what their reporters are up against if they can get out and do some reporting once in a while.

Q [Henry]: Much as the basic principles in journalism hold for print, broadcast etc. What makes online reporting different for the traditional media channels?

A: One thing reporters do differently for online as opposed to broadcast or print is to think differently about their stories from the start. They need to realize that the medium really does change the message. Online news consumers are looking for lots of different things: interactive elements, graphics, maps, video, slide shows, and so forth. Reporters need to collect information they can use to create those kinds of online extras. That doesn't mean they have to experts at actually producing the online elements, but they need to understand what

CAN be done so they come back with the necessary materials.

A few other things that journalists should know about the online audience:

They tend to be "skimmers." It may be tempting to write long stories for online use because there's no limit to what you can put on the Web. But surveys of users show they tend to browse for information, so very long stories are not that appealing. In addition, headlines and captions are even more important online than they are in print.

Beyond that, journalists writing for online media should provide access to more information in the form of hyperlinks.

IIP Moderator: Deborah, for students of journalism and young journalists, what personal and professional skills should they hone as they enter the profession?

A: I think young journalists should be curious and courageous -- both personally and professionally. Many young people I meet who say they want to be journalists don't seem to care much about the news. They think it would be an interesting job, but they don't know what it really takes to do it well. Journalists have to want to know what's really going on so they can keep the public informed. That means they shouldn't stop asking questions once they get the first or second answer. And they need courage because this isn't an easy job. They'll face obstacles and they may get discouraged. If they know why they really want to do this job, to seek the truth and inform people so they can make good decisions in their daily lives, they can overcome those obstacles.

Journalists also should be fair-minded people. They have to be able to put aside their own beliefs and listen to those of others so they can fairly represent them in the media. They have to care, deeply, about accuracy and be willing to check and re-check information to make sure they have it right.

And one more thing: They have to be willing to work hard!

Q [Irene]: Hello Deborah, based on my experience, I am inclined to think of 'independent media' as a fallacy, even an

oxymoron. I tend to regard the independence of the media in terms of degree rather than absolutes. Is it practically possible for the media to divorce itself from the competing interests -- political, financial and even personal -- that have to be weighed every single day?

A: Perhaps another way of looking at this is to think of independence as a goal, not a given. I agree that it is a constant struggle to maintain an independent press. There is always pressure on journalists to influence news coverage, from governments or owners or sponsors. That can lead to self-censorship, with journalists avoiding certain kinds of stories because they're just too controversial.

Instead of divorcing themselves from competing interests, I think journalists need to be aware of them and to ask themselves how they can report every story in an independent way. Sometimes they may need to disclose to the public what's been going on behind the scenes, so the public can judge for itself just how independent the news media are.

IIP Moderator: Legendary journalist Edward R. Murrow is the subject of the State Department's online booklet, "About America: Edward R. Murrow, Journalism At Its Best (<http://usinfo.state.gov/products/pubs/murrow/>)." The publication is available for free download.

Q [PETER]: Thanks Deborah. What would you think are some of the greatest challenges facing African journalism in the 21st Century?

A: African journalists face many of the same challenges their colleagues face around the world to different degrees. In addition to the pressures from outside influences, they have to adapt to the needs of a changing audience and new media and the economics of the news business. I think one of the greatest challenges we all face is to maintain our credibility with the public so they will support us in our struggles.

Q [Henry]: I am sure Deborah has met many journalists from Africa, What are their major inadequacies and their strengths as compared to their American colleagues?

A: I hesitate to answer this because I try to avoid sweeping generalizations! Again, I think we all face similar challenges to different degrees. Some journalists overcome them; some don't.

It's not about geography, it's about individual effort and institutional support no matter where you look around the world.

Q [PETER]: Overall, it is increasingly becoming difficult for journalists in Africa to stay in the profession perhaps due to some of the pressures you have outlined. How does one hang in there? Any tips please?

A: I see this phenomenon of "burn out" everywhere I go. It is difficult to maintain the energy and passion for the business when you are so often thwarted. One thing that can keep you fresh is working on a project or story that you care deeply about. You still have to do your daily work, but if you can also do a little bit along the way on a story that matters to you can keep the passion alive. Another thing that helps is having the support of colleagues. Journalists need to encourage each other.

When you get together, try not to spend the entire time complaining about how bad things are. Look at the good work you and others have been able to do despite the pressures, and let it inspire you to do more. Trainings, workshops and informal gatherings to share good work can do wonders to remind journalists why we got into this business in the first place. We know it wasn't the high salary or the great working conditions, right? A reporter I know talks about creating a "conspiracy of excellence," by which she means a group of journalists who challenge each other to keep doing good work even when their bosses don't support them. It can be energizing to have others whose work you respect push you to do even better.

Thanks for asking! (Shameless self-promotion follows.) NewsLab (<http://www.newslab.org/>) is a small non-profit devoted to journalism training. Our main focus is on broadcast journalism, but I also do workshops for print and online journalists. We have lots of resources for journalists available online and I hope you will find them useful.

IIP Moderator: Can you tell us a bit about your organization, NewsLab?

A: I have enjoyed our conversation today. Thanks again for inviting me to discuss journalism issues with you.

IIP Moderator: We would like to thank all of our participants in Uganda and Ms. Potter for taking the time to Webchat with us today. The Webchat is now closed.

A transcript of today's Webchat will be available on our USINFO Webchat Station (<http://usinfo.state.gov/usinfo/Products/Webchats.html>) within one business day.

(While guests are chosen for their expertise, the views expressed by the guests are their own and do not necessarily reflect those of the U.S. Department of State.)

(end transcript)

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